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THE

WELCOME OF CHRIST

TO

PARADISE.

A Story of Easter Even.

BY

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"He descended into the place of departed spirits: the third day He rose from the dead."

—*Apostles' Creed.*

THE WELCOME OF CHRIST TO PARADISE.

I.

THE COMING.

He cometh! Lo, He cometh!
From earth His Spirit flies;
The dead Christ laid in Joseph's tomb
Is nearing Paradise.
See! on the far horizon,
Upborne on angel's wing,
Ten thousand souls redeemed and saved
Are crowding round their King!

He cometh! Lo, He cometh!
The darkness now is past—
And we who cried, How long, O Lord,
Shall see His face at last;
The saint, the sage, the prophet,
Who saw by faith's pure ray
This far-off hour of final joy,
Shall greet their Lord to-day.

Behold the Bridegroom cometh!
Hark to the deafening psalm!
With chorus notes, with victor crowns,
With amaranth and palm,
The souls redeemed in Paradise
Are hurrying on their way;
Oh! go ye out to meet Him,
And greet your Lord to-day.

II.

RECITATIVE.

'Twas Michael, the valiant archangel, servant of God
for His people,
Prince of the Host of the Lord, who thus to a group
in the meadow
Spoke of this day of deliverance, and told of the
coming of Jesus,

Pausing to rest for a space, as he stood by the banks
of the river,—
The River of Water of Life,—and pointed the way
towards the sun-gate,
Bathed in a golden light, while the purple shades of
the mountains,
Touched with its crests of fire, flared beacons of
welcome and worship.

Out on the Highway of Peace, which led towards the
arch of the sun-gate,
The pathway which spirits redeemed trod as they
came from Earth's darkness,
Angels and children and seraphs, with the spirits of
just men made perfect,
Flocked round the triumphing Christ, and welcomed
Him King in His beauty;
Welcomed Him God and yet human, Saviour and
King of Immortals,
Brother and Helper of Man, Herald and Son of the
Father,
Welcomed Him Hope of the Ages, Seal of the cer-
tain hereafter.

III.

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

Thou hast come to Thy kingdom and glory.
  Thy redeemed have been waiting for Thee ;
We have heard of the terrible story,
  How Thy hands have been nailed to the tree ;
We have heard of Gethsemane's sorrow,
  How an angel supported Thee there,
And the gloom which our spirits would borrow,
  Grows bright by the answer to prayer.
Thou art welcome, O Saviour of mortals,
  All hail to Thy coming again !
Thou hast past the dark dread of death's portals,
  Thou hast opened Thy kingdom to men.
The grave could no longer confine Thee,
  For death has been robbed of his power,
Nor the spirits in Limbo malign Thee,
  For darkness rules not this blest hour.
Ride on ! while Thy prophets and sages
  Pour out their glad anthems before Thee ;
Ride on ! while the souls of all ages
  In lowliness bend to adore Thee ;
Let the sword of Thy triumph attend Thee :
  Let meekness and righteousness own,
While legions of angels defend Thee,
  Their King coming back to His throne !

IV.

RECITATIVE.

Then I saw in my dream, as they passed
The cleft in the rock where I stood,
Eager that form to behold,
Scanning its features to see
Saviour and Master in one,
Borne home by the angels of God—
The face of the Saviour of men!

From the sighs of the place of a skull,
From the shadows which creep round the tomb,
From the doubt and the terror of death,
From the gloom and the fear of the grave,
That face, all serene in its light,
That form, all divine in its power,
Had burst from the shell of decay,
Had come to its God and its home,
As the bead in the moss-covered dell
Breathes, sparkles, ascends, and is gone;
As the sun in the cloud-banks of fog
Shines on through the shades of the mist,
And in shining mounts up through the gloom.

As once unto men it was given,
That face all resplendent with light
On the mountain of rapture to see,
While the prophets of law and of fire
As hostages came to the scene,
And the voice of the Father was heard;

So now in this vision of faith
The face of the Master I saw,
Serene, yet transfigured with joy,
Majestic, yet peaceful, at rest—
Rejoicing and blessed and calm!

While thus on these faces I gazed,
And dreaded the heart-beats of Time,
Lest the vision should fade on my sight,
A group by the wayside I saw—
The prophets of God, who their song
To Jesus the Conqueror raised.

V.

CHORUS OF CHRISTIAN PROPHETS.

In the niches of time we have stood
Bearing our witness to Thee;
We have sealed our belief with our blood,
Thy face, O our Master, to see;
We have spoken, while men in derision
Have scoffed in a wild despair;
We have heeded the heavenly vision
With the spirit of humble prayer;
We have answered the voices from heaven,
God's message we've dared to tell;
We have scattered that holy leaven
Which has saved a world from hell.

God's workmen in travail and sorrow,
God's miners, who dig for the ore,
We have lived in the sure to-morrow,
Our souls have been weary and sore.
In our hearts was a pure desire,
In our minds was foreknowledge of death;
We have handled that sacred fire
Which has lived with our dying breath.
Time was the space for our tears,
Strength was the gift of life's span,
Existence a burden of years—
But our field was the spirit of man.

And now, in the Autumn's gleaning,
No longer the spirit grieves,
For the reaper the sower's meaning
Learns 'mid the golden sheaves.
Thy presence, O Christ, adorning,
Our palms at Thy feet we lay,
The dew of Thy birth is the morning
Of everlasting day.

VI.

RECITATIVE.

It was then I heard hurrying feet, and lo! Michael my guide stood before me,
Leading some awe-stricken sages, who halted and stood by the wayside.
Taking the hand of the foremost and leading him straightway to Jesus,
The mailèd archangel thus spake, as he screened his strong eyes in the sunlight:
"These, too, are Thy children, O Master—Thy followers, O Christ, in the twilight;
Never of Thee have they heard, save the voice which has sounded within them;
Never Thy face have they seen, save the light which doth lighten the human;
Never Thy hands have they clasped, save the grasp of their souls on the conscience—
Therefore to them it is given—now, O! blest King, to behold Thee,
Bless them, O! Jesus, our Master—Thy children own Thee and love Thee.
Following the light which was in them, never misled by the darkness."

VII.

CHORUS OF HEATHEN SAGES.

Lord and Master we are Thine,
We are human—Thou divine,
Yet for Thee the soul doth pine.

In the darkness we have head
Voices from Thy Holy Word,
Thou our spirits' depths hast stirred.

Deep must ever call to deep,
Conscience cannot always sleep,
We the truth of God would keep.

In God's image we are made,
With His lineaments arrayed,
God within us is obeyed.

Thou hast spoken to our need,
Blessed they who have believed—
Seeing not, yet undeceived.

Saviour Thou of souls unknown,
When Thou comest to Thy throne,
Place us—place us—near Thine own!

VIII.

RECITATIVE.

But hark! is it children I hear
Shouting their carols of joy?
Mid the hosts of God's angels and saints.
Sages and prophets of old.
Their voices break in on my ear.
The voices of childhood confessed.
Fresh in their fullness of song.
Resonant, tender and pure.
'Tis the utterance of childhood I hear.
'Tis the voice of the little ones saved.
Whose angels forever in light
The face of the Father behold!
Then plucking up courage I said
To the guide who stood close by my side,
"The meaning of this would I know.
What children in glory are these?"
And Michael my leader, replied—
"'Tis the welcome to Christ in His power,
Of those who His passion have shared—
The martyrs who slain in the night.
Suffered the sword thrusts of him
Who Bethlehem's town filled with woe.
While Rachel in mourning refused
That comfort which comes not with years,
As she wept o'er her innocents slain."

IX.

CHORUS OF HOLY INNOCENTS.

Thou art welcome—O, how welcome;
Thou the world's expectant King:
Early would we go to greet Thee,
Early songs of welcome sing.
To the crowns of Thy rejoicing
We would add a martyr's gem;
We who died that we might save Thee
On the plains of Bethlehem.

By the cruel sword of Herod
Ere we passed life's threshold o'er,
Like the fragrant early blossom
Seen and felt but found no more,—
For a moment in the gloaming
Living—uttering but a cry,
We have done our sacred errand—
Died, that Jesus might not die.

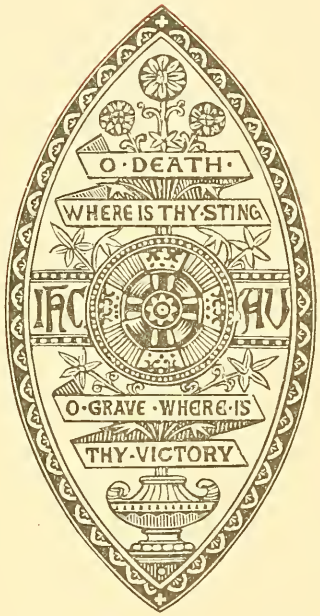
Others may have lived and suffered,
Others may have preached Thy word;
Some in kingly state and purple
May proclaim Thee Christ their Lord;
We have lived that we might spare Thee
To redeem a world from loss;
We have died that we might bear Thee
Fellowship upon Thy cross.

X.

CONCLUSION.

I raised my head for a moment, the organ notes were low,
There were chords which stirred my spirit as I felt the steady flow
Of the thoughts which had overcome me with an impulse strong and deep,
As kneeling beside the column, I had fallen a moment to sleep.
I had thought of the tomb in the garden, so empty, forsaken, and bare:
I had heard the closing anthem, and had knelt for the final prayer:
It must have been in a moment, Heaven opened on my ken,
For I saw this glimpse of Paradise, ere we chanted the last Amen.
Out from the holy silence of these forty days of prayer
My feet pressed on with the surging crowd in the busy thoroughfare,
Back to the weary, dreary world, with its cares and toils I came,
But my heart I had left at the altar rail, enshrined with the Master's name.

And never can I forget the glimpse of that life that is to be,
Which came to my soul in that organ strain, while I felt what I could not see.
And through all my life my faith grows strong as I come to Easter Even,
And think of the vision, which God vouchsafed, of the welcome of Christ to Heaven.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